YAMAHA AVENTAGE RX-A1020

Yamaha Aventage RX-A1020 networked AV receiver

Price: $1799

Yamaha's third generation of its premium 'Aventage' range is here. Now consisting of five models, the RX-A1020 is right in the middle, but shares some of the higher end features.

EQUIPMENT

For example, it has the 'Anti-resonance wedge' — a fifth foot right in the middle of the base plate. It also has eight HDMI inputs with two HDMI outputs.

Unlike the higher two models, though, it has seven rather than nine amplifiers. Highly configurable (including the ability to drive a pair of 'Zone 2' speakers), each of these is rated at 110W into 8 ohms, full audible spectrum, distortion at 0.06%, two channels driven.

This being Yamaha, it does not implement Dolby Pro Logic IIz — which adds front height channels — but instead has its own high quality processing modes which use similarly placed front 'Presence' speakers.

In addition to the support for audio in a second zone, you can also deliver analogue video in the form of composite, S-Video or component video.

The unit has full 7.1-channel analogue inputs and full 7.1-channel analogue outputs (the subwoofer socket is also doubled up, but the signal is the same for both). In addition to composite and component video, it also supports S-Video, an increasingly rare inclusion these days. Plus it comes with a built-in phono preamplifier (for moving magnet cartridges).

Obviously it has network capabilities with an Ethernet port, but it is also supplied with a Wi-Fi adaptor, freeing you from the necessity of having a nearby connection to your home network (if you have Wi-Fi, of course).

PERFORMANCE

Yamaha's approach to WiFi networking is interesting, but it can be quite challenging Setting up the Wi-Fi networking was, for me, a little bit like going back in time. Rather than being a USB Wi-Fi dongle it is a standalone Wi-Fi access box with two Ethernet ports. It draws power from a USB-style socket on the back of the receiver and one of its ports is plugged into the receiver's Ethernet port.

If you have press-button WPS set-up on your Wi-Fi network then the unit is easy to install. I don't. Fortunately the instructions are clear, but do be aware that you will have to first plug the unit into the Ethernet port on a computer and open a browser interface to enter the necessary details (including your Wi-Fi password) into the unit.

So for me it was harder than usual to set up. But while I often find USB Wi-Fi dongles problematic in my review environment, this Wi-Fi interface worked almost perfectly at all times. The receiver supplies power to it even when switched off, so you can use it with the Yamaha iPhone remote app to switch on the system. And with two additional Ethernet connections, you may find it convenient in providing Wi-Fi access to a nearby Blu-ray player or TV.

The only relative weakness was that Apple AirPlay was a little less reliable in my office via Wi-Fi that it was with a wired Ethernet connection (note, though, this was using a 802.11g Wi-Fi network; the adaptor does support 802.11n).

Even though AirPlay is provided, Yamaha's own iOS and Android control apps also include music streaming functions which more or less replicate this, and have the added advantage of leaving the remote control functions handy.

Speaking of these apps, or at least the iOS version, a useful set of controls is provided. The app also works on an iPad with a slightly different layout which makes good use of the larger screen area. If you also have a Yamaha Blu-ray player, as I do, then the app automatically switches on a full set of controls for it when its input is selected.

The only oddity was that while you can change the names for the inputs within the app, these are not fed through to the unit itself, which maintains its own renaming facility with a maximum of nine characters available. If you use that feature then the names are reflected in the app's names for the inputs.

The receiver also provides a web interface which allows some degree of control, but is useful primarily for allowing you to back up all the receiver's settings to computer, and later restore them. The backup file was only 42kB.

Setting up the receiver was surprisingly fast with Yamaha's YMAO speaker and room calibration system whizzing though the procedure. While you can have the unit do multipoint measurements, it defaults to a single measurement. There was no apparent way to lock any pre-determined settings, such as speaker size. With my system the YPAO auto calibration chose 80Hz, but left the front speakers on 'Large'. My centre speaker, while very capable, should not properly considered 'Large'. I changed it to 'Small' after the calibration, and the sound didn't seem to suffer for the change.

Given how advanced this receiver is in so many ways, it was surprising that its auto set-up capabilities do not provide different crossover frequencies for the different speakers. You can adjust the single crossover a long way (40 to 200Hz), but it can be useful to apply a 40Hz crossover, say, to your front speakers and a 100Hz crossover to the rear ones.

With only that size change, the receiver sounded excellent all round with a smooth and natural sound. You can select from several different EQ curves (it defaulted to 'Flat' but also offered 'Natural', 'Off' and 'Front', which makes the other speakers sound like the front stereo pair. Its room calibration functions include adjustments for early boundary reflections from the loudspeakers.

The video handling was generally very good, and most certainly extremely convenient if you abide by one simple condition. That is: do not use the receiver's ability to upscale HDMI video inputs. You may well want to use it to process analogue inputs, but if you want to use it for HDMI upscaling then this will come at the cost of quick menu overlays.

At native resolution — including 1080p/24 and full-HD 3D (I was unable to check 4K) — the receiver overlays its menus over the video, which makes for exceptional responsiveness. It also has some useful information for the tech nerd (e.g. me), disclosing the supported video resolutions on HDMI connected displays, and showing in numbers what the auto lip sync delay is for attached displays (0 for my little Samsung monitor TV, and 123ms for a big JVC projector).

But if you use the video scaling capabilities of the receiver, then invoking the GUI makes the receiver switch off the scaling before displaying the menus. Quick *ad hoc* displays of information or use of the 'Option' menu to change some setting become exercises in waiting as the TV resyncs with the new signal standard whenever you press those keys.

The new media functions of the receiver were a slightly mixed bag. What it does offer, it offers very nicely. We've already mentioned the Apple AirPlay support, and the streaming capability of the mobile app. There is also traditional DLNA support, which is driven from the receiver rather than the network music source. Good facilities are provided for scooting through long lists of Artists and Albums and Songs using the on-screen display, while using the iOS App was even faster and more convenient.

The receiver also supports music from USB devices plugged into the front port (remember the rear one is only a 5V power socket, not a proper USB port at all). It worked with the AAC and regular WMA (but not the lossless version) and WAV and MP3 material on my test memory sticks, plus FLAC at 24-bit/96kHz, but not at 24-bit/192kHz. It had a manful go at 24/96 FLAC in 5.1 channels but interpreted it as 2.0 and kept dropping out. It read cover art from my iPod touch and iPhone and once again allowed quick movement through lists, one or ten pages at a time.

For online content you get internet radio via the very capable vTuner. As usual with this you can set up favourites via the website, and get access thousands of podcasts as well. The omissions are only the various online subscription music sources, such as Spotify, offered by others, but you can always access these via a smartphone or tablet and then stream them to the Yamaha.

CONCLUSION

The Yamaha Aventage RX-A1020 is an excellent all round networked AV receiver, although at this price it really ought to implement multiple crossovers for different speaker positions. *Stephen Dawson* ⊣

VERDICT

Yamaha Aventage RX-A1020 networked AV receiver

Price: $1799

- Excellent performance
- GUI overlay
- Excellent network support and performance

- No separate crossover frequencies for 'Small' speakers
- Have to choose between scaling and nifty GUI

FIRMWARE VERSION: 1.10
POWER: 7 x 110W, 8 ohms, 20-20,000kHz, 0.06% THD (two channels driven)
INPUTS: 8 x HDMI, 4 x component video, 4 x S-Video, 5 x composite video, 9 x analogue stereo, 1 x phono, 1 x 7.1 analogue, 4 x optical digital, 3 x coaxial digital, 1 x USB, 1 x Ethernet, 1 x WiFi adaptor (supplied)
OUTPUTS: 2 x HDMI, 1 x component video, 2 x S-Video, 2 x composite video, 1 x analogue stereo, 1 x 7.1 pre-out, 9 pairs speaker binding posts
ZONE: 1 x analogue stereo, 1 x composite video (redirectable from main output), 1 x S-Video (redirectable from main output), 1 x component video (redirectable from main output), assignable amplifiers
OTHER: 1 x Remote In, 1 x Remote Out, 2 x Trigger, 1 x RS-232C, 1 x USB-style 5V power
DIMENSIONS (whd): 435 x 182 x 432mm
WEIGHT: 15.1kg
WARRANTY: Four years

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